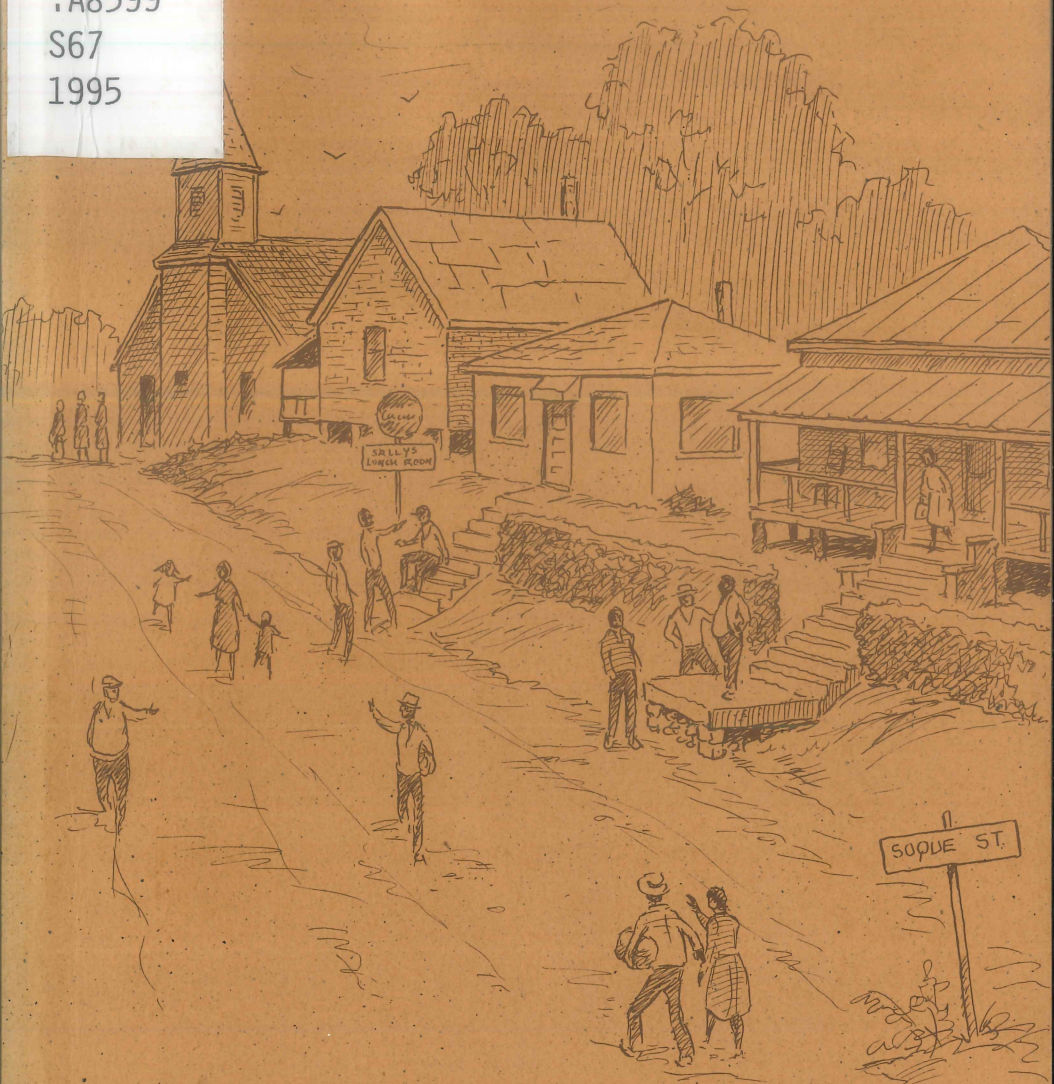
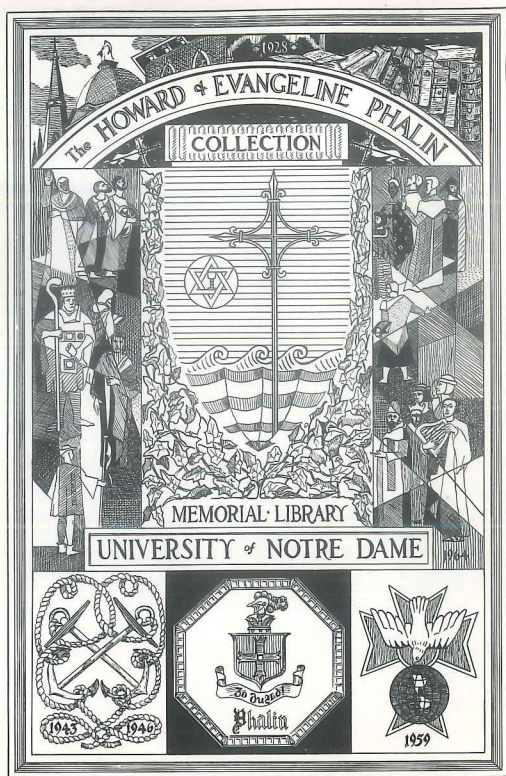


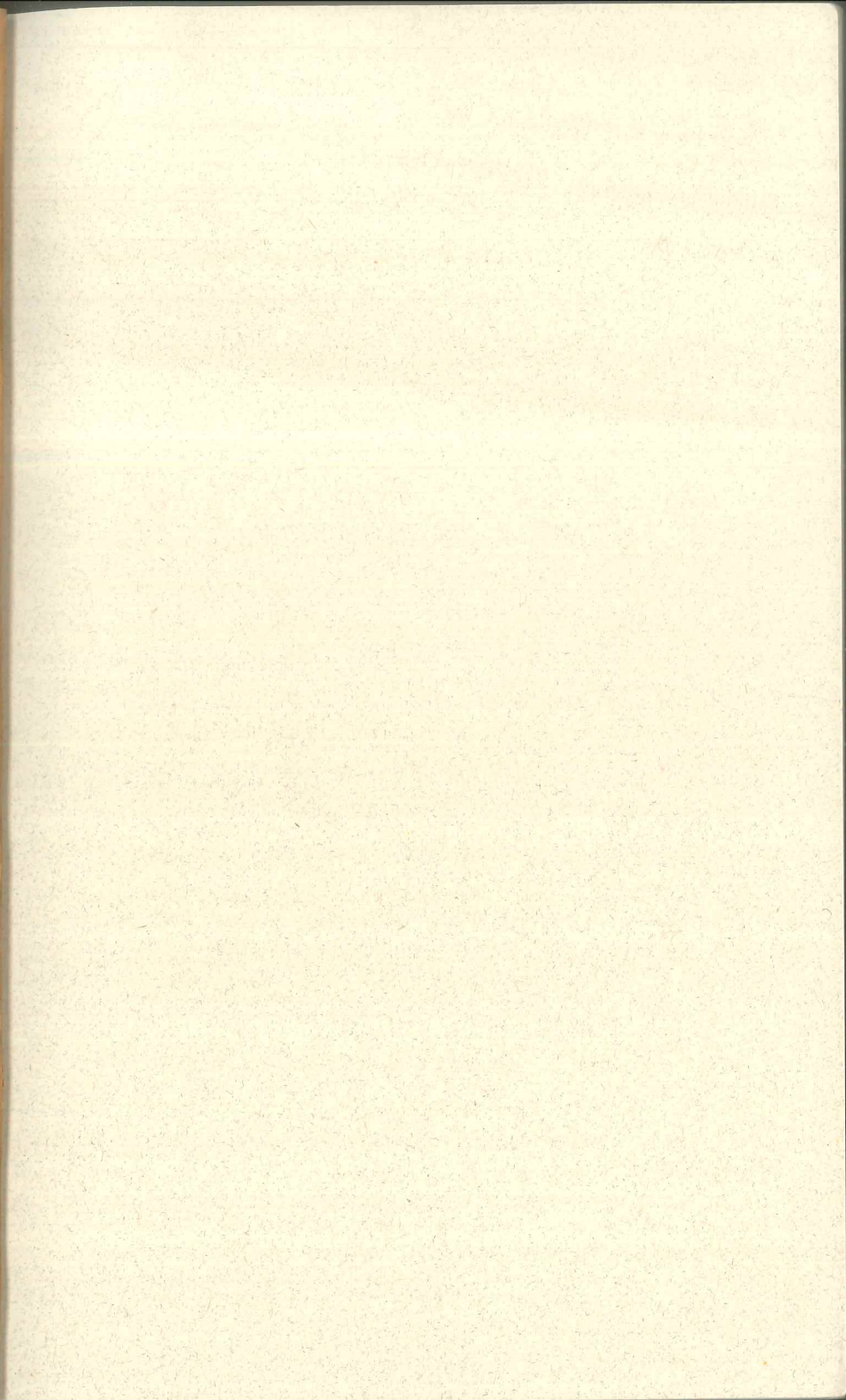
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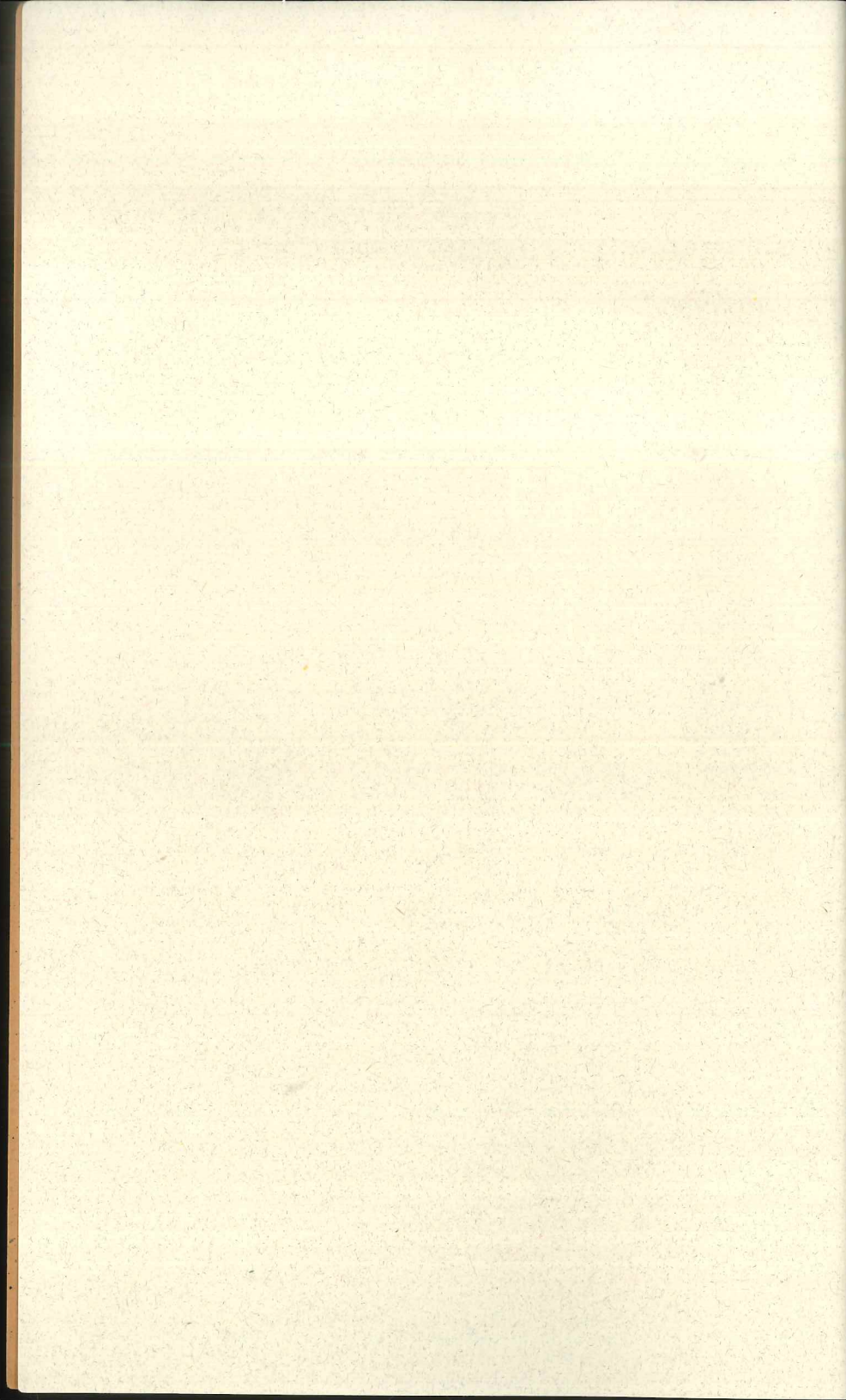


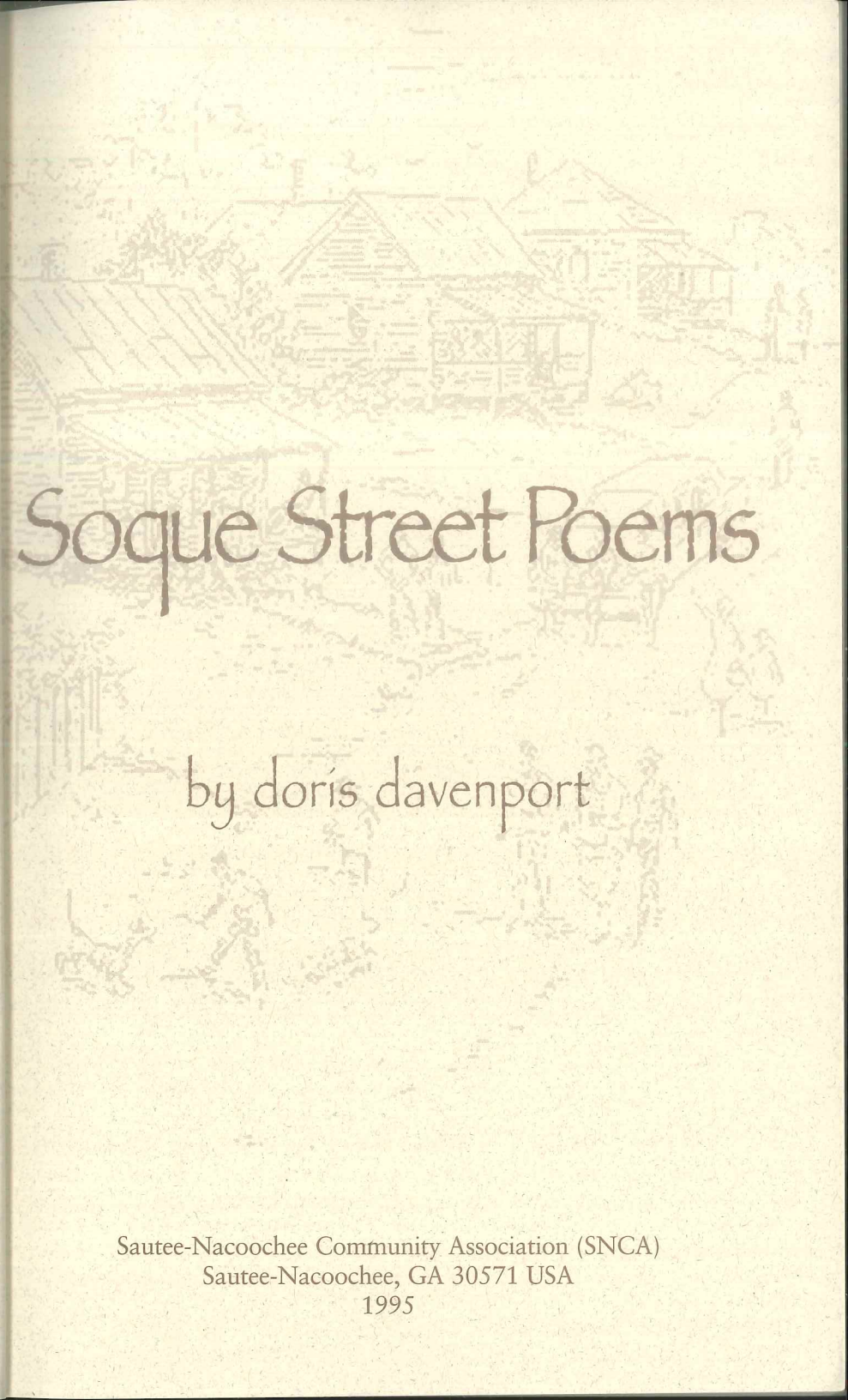
Soque Street Poems

by doris davenport









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Sautee-Nacoochee Community Association (SNCA)
Sautee-Nacoochee, GA 30571 USA
1995

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Dedications

I dedicate this book to my daughter, Ani, because it's history.

— *Audrey Davenport*

I agree with Audrey, and so, dedicate this book, with love to Ani's children, and her children's children; to all my nieces and nephews and their children and children's children *ad infinitum*; to Appalachian African- Americans (*Afrilachians*) everywhere; to all who revere, respect, and preserve the richness and complexity of African-american cultures.

— *doris davenport*

Introduction

When I was six, my great-granddaddy, Mr. Arthur Wright, told me that if a turtle bit you, it would hold on til it thundered. Then, chewing raw garlic like it was Juicy Fruit gum, and smiling, he offered me a taste. I bit the garlic, and went into a trance of sensory overload. Instantaneously accepted that the world was amazing, miraculous, and real surprising, all at once. That basic worldview has remained with me, and is partly responsible for these poems.

These poems are based in fact but most of them have some - ahem - poetic embroidering. Their intention is to celebrate us. To recreate, preserve, and remind us that we had (and have) viable, culturally rich communities; that that sense of kin and connectedness is a living legacy, especially for young folk growing up as I did - economically poor, sometimes frustrated and lost, but with abundant, exuberant creative energy. These poems are love poems; praise poems of the unique African-American communities of Southern Appalachia.



There are three repeated symbols/motifs throughout the book: the medicine wheel, the dream catcher, and the love knot. The first two are Cherokee, used here in respectful acknowledgement of the First Peoples, of their spiritual legacy and presence in their ancient homeland, and of my own Native American ancestry. The wheel is adapted from one made by Morning Star Connor, and given to me by Ginny Carney. The dream catcher was a gift from Anna of the Sweetwater Coffehouse (where I gratefully inhabit an office space on the porch). The love knot is of African American origin, so far as I know (we drew it in first grade; don't remember who taught us how). These three symbols represent *my* Northeast Georgia: an ancient spirituality and mysticism, a dreamlike isolation and eccentricity, a passionate love that binds us to each other and to these hills.



This collection is maybe half of the total manuscript; several poems are edited and shortened for inclusion here. I started to write some form of these poems while still in Los Angeles in 1981. I finished a first draft in 1992 here in Cornelia, and several other drafts as well and I now expect some version of *Soque Street* to be a lifelong ongoing work in progress.

In October 1993 I first read from *Soque Street* at Western Carolina University and received a standing ovation. In January 1994, I read to my "kin" - an audience of my people, at the Spiritual Israel Church in Cornelia; and again, in April, at the library. In Oct. '94, I performed the poems as a one-woman theater piece at SNCA. Most of the poems included here are from those readings. Wherever and whenever I've performed, the response and interest have been almost unanimous: where is the book?! Well, here it is - at least, a part of it.

And so, a special Thank You to Jimmy & SNCA, Ms. Ethel M. Davenport, my mother; Elder W.L. Pruitt, and Kathryn Stripling Byer for providing and being a part of the first and most receptive audiences for this poetry. Also, special thanks to the Habersham Arts Council, whose having me as "Featured Artist" was the final catalyst for publishing this excerpted book. As for the people in the poems, including the Gibsons, all of you, living and dead, are the reason that I am a writer and a poet. My gratitude to you, like my writing about *Soque Street*, and my love of these hills and mountains, is lifelong and endless.

Then again, there are lots of people to and for whom I am grateful. These folk have enhanced the quality of my recent life with everything from neighborly kindness (like coming over with a shotgun, bringing me poke salad) to writing grants, stage direction and experience. This is a long list, and it should be longer, but encroaching senility and debilitating ecstasy make me forgetful, y'all. So, if you ain't here, and you think you ought to be, don't be mad. You know, and I know.

THANKS: Audrey the Artist & Ani; Addie, Linda & Phil Rice; Rose Mason; Anna Anderson, Alternate Roots, Beth & Jennifer Busch, Bonnie Steckelberg of CSA, dolores davenport, Sallie Bingham, Community Bank & Trust; Courtney, Rachel, Alice & Hoke Johnston; Gail Brooksher, John Kollock, Jeanne Crowe Toineeta, Jesse Crapo, Joan King, D.J. Fenlon, Isa Dempsey, Judith Dewitt, Katrina Dorsey, Michael Granberry, Georgia Council for the Arts, Geri Ingram, Donna Johnson, Kentucky Foundation for Women, Louise Runyon Barth, Maria Macon, Morning Star Connor, Nikki Cole, Penny Pinson, Vivian Price, Katharine Newman, Dani Nieves, North Carolina Arts Council, Sweetwater Coffehouse, the Syvenna Foundation for Women, Richard and Jimmie A. Tinius, Donna Trotter, ZAMI; the Ancestors, Orishas, Goddesses and Spirits.

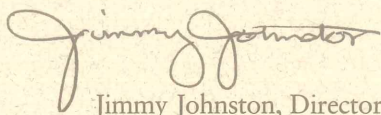
Peace and love, everybody.



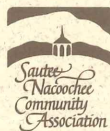
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(July 29, 1995 Sautee, GA)

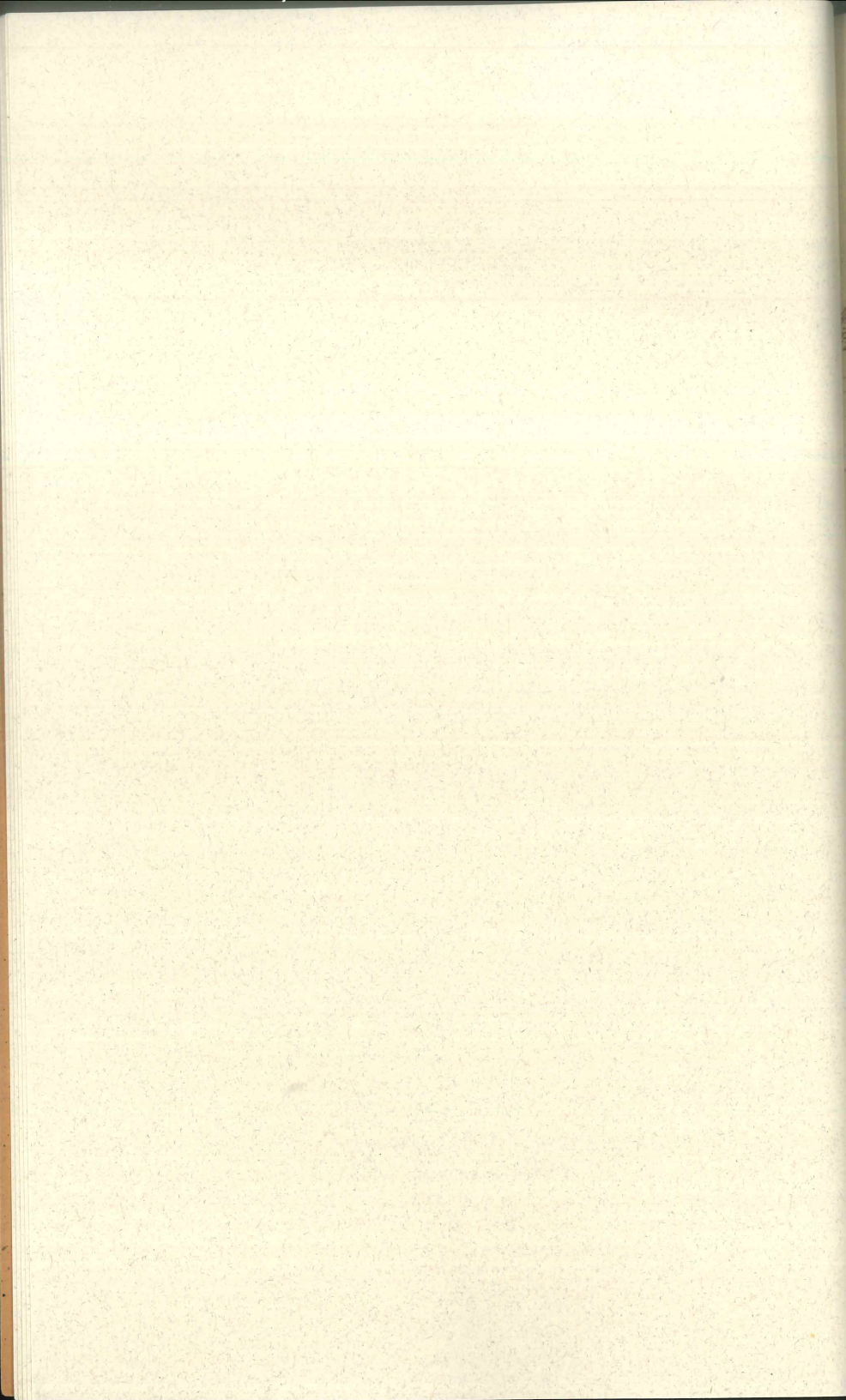
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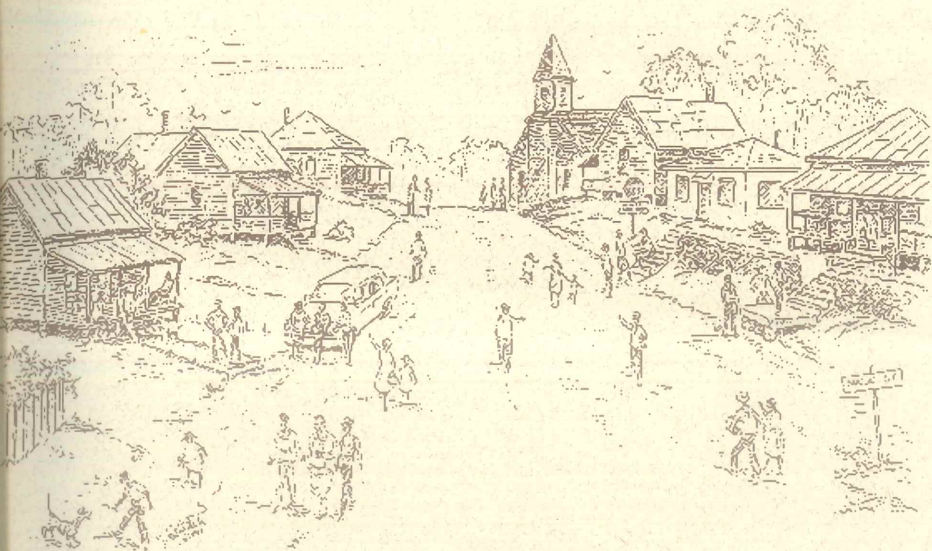
The Sautee-Nacoochee Community Association (SNCA) exists to preserve the historic, cultural and environmental resources of this area. doris davenport has become a member of the Community Association family - performing, teaching, directing and providing her ebullient energy as an audience member. She has also introduced us to the term *Afralachian* and helped us see the reality and limitations of "skin privilege" and our Eurocentric vision. The Board of the Community Association supports the publication of this work as an opportunity to present stories of the vibrant African American communities in these mountains. We are delighted to be a partner, along with Community Bank & Trust, in the publication of *Soque Street Poems* by doris davenport.



Jimmy Johnston, Director







Soque Street Poems

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Sak-wi Yi



In the beginning, before the
beginning, words
had no meaning.

There was no beginning,
You just were, and are.
The Original Nomma
is a toy, to you.



Sak-wi Yi of the
Cherokee Peoples
became worded
Soquee, then Soque.
Sounds inflected
in rhythmical air,
Sak-wi Yi, village
of the First People
bound in a sacred place
“Appalachian foothills”
in a language with no
meaning except one
arbitrarily assigned:



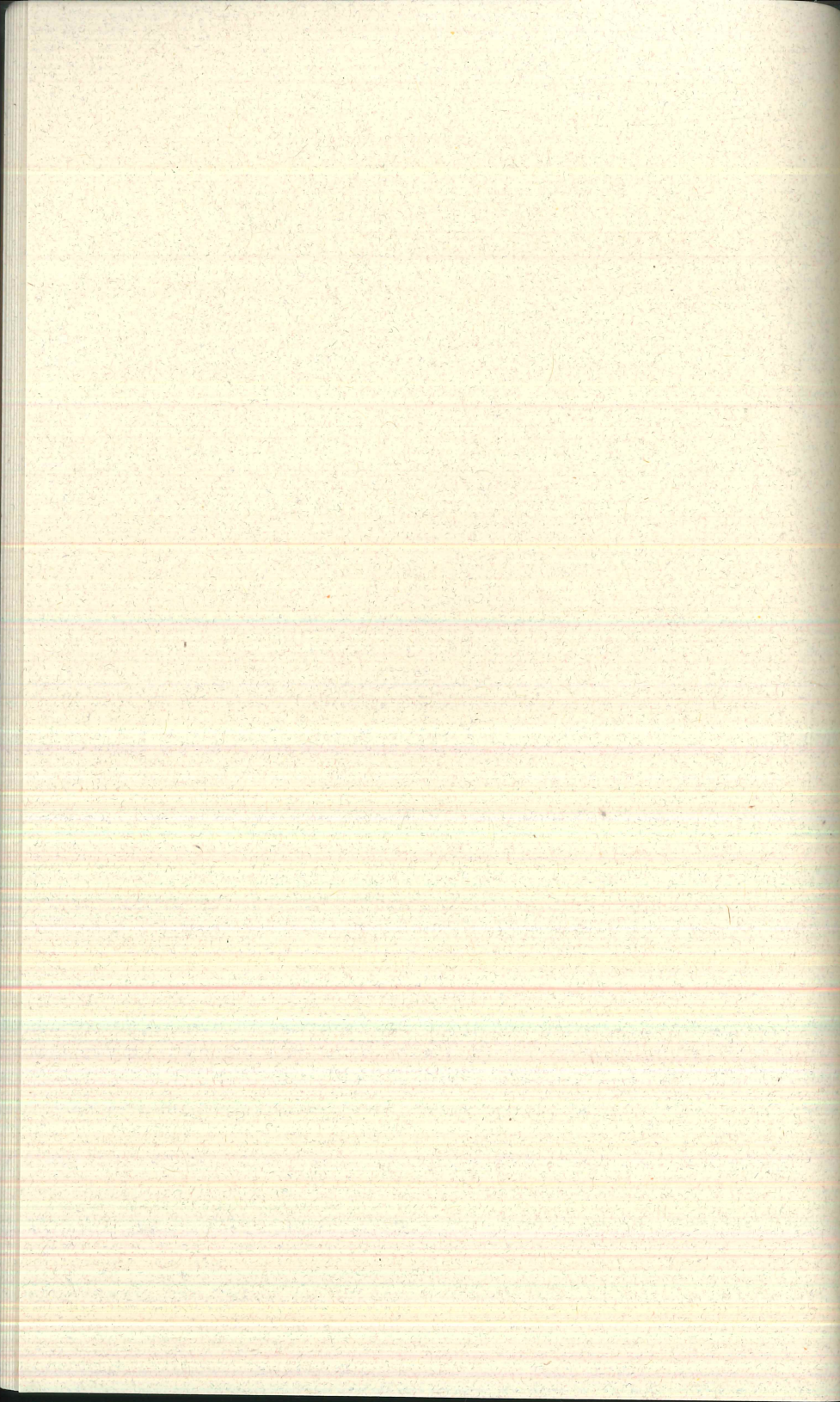
Don't mess with the Sacred.
It will get you, every time.

"Now, I know you remember...so and so"

meaning somebody who rode through town once, ten years ago or someone who lived and died before your birth. They expect you to remember, to know, just like your mind is their mind and if you don't, they might take it personal. Get so mad at you, they can't get on with the story.

Not like Fannie Mae. She will get all into a story and catch herself: "But that was before you were born." Fannie Mae will pause, grin for emphasis and say, "And I *wish* you coulda seen it !"

not me.
when i get through
when i'm done
won't be no wishing
you could see.
you gone see.



PART ONE

THE BOOK OF FANNIE MAE



26 miles south of Cornelia,
in a valley, affected by mountain fog
or something
messing with their heads 26 miles south, on
the Old Cornelia highway that
would make
you think
dizzy, time you got through.
26 miles. and something *was*
strange down there.
Check it out:

attitude explained

People like Miz Shuebergh had one thing going on. Johnny's Momma I mean - not his sisters or his wife. And *that* crowd: Amy's, Claude's and them. But there were others. They lived in nice houses painted white; dressed their kids real nice (took piano lessons, from Mr. Valentine from Atlanta) went to St. John's and cut their grass *every* day. Then, there were teachers, right from Gainesville: Miz Williams, Miz McCrary, and Dr. Butler.

Dr. Butler, though, he was just a regular man. Just a regular man - lived right there off Athens Street. And we had a cafe-restaurant, too! Maxey's, on Athens Street, just as good as Paschal's, in Atlanta. Even before they built E. E. Butler High School, we had a bad high school band, stepping high and mean, all the time. So, we didn't have an attitude; we *gave* people attitudes.

(They were just jealous is all.)

Miz Fannie Mae Gibson Shuebergh

1910 -



Well now, I wasn't born in Gainesville, no, but I been here s' long it seems like I was, I guess. But we lived up in Dillard and Clayton, when I was a girl and also Cornelia, after I was full growed, and married. And if I could, I'd live up there right now!

It was so pretty. There was a creek we used to play in, and Momma made the best apple pies. From our own trees! I just *wish* you coulda seen it.

And when John - my brother - went to the army, he wanted an apple pie to take with him, he said. Course, he couldn't, by Momma being dead, by then. Never will forget the day he left. He'd took the mule and wagon, to get a chest of drawers, and he come back and said it was time to go. I asked him for a dime, and could I go with him. He said he didn't have a dime; and I couldn't go, and I was just too outdone, with him!

The mule's name? No, I don't remember, but do you know, if your pants legs get any higher, you will have to have a party and invite them down to see your shoes!



'Course now, you never know what people see in each other - a man and a woman. You never do know, do you? And whatever it is they see, they can't make you see it! They can't. Half the time, why - they don't know, themselves! And I have got a lot of nieces and nephews, and I love them all. Will & Kate's, John & Evie's, Jesse's, Lula's. Why, I got great nieces and nephews, too. But what I mean - they all grown. Or, they think they grown. And they don't pay me any more attention than the man in the moon. Matter of fact, they'd probably pay more attention to him - just because they Gibsons, and all Gibsons, are stubborn.

Still, I didn't think it was a good idea for my niece Ethel Mae (that Mae in her name's after me) to marry Claude. But - she was grown, by then! So, they got married, and when she had her first baby, I was there and it's a good thing!

That sorry Claude was drunk; he was always drunk, look like. That night, when I got there, she was just ready to have that baby! No - I never had any children but any fool would know what to do. Any fool, except Claude. Out in the yard - cold as it was, crying and talking to his fool self. Peoples, I came as close to killing a man then, as I ever did, in my life. Told him I'd slap him into next year (and it was January) if he didn't get out of that yard, and go get Nurse Greenlee or Dr. Butler. And then, when Greenlee got there - and she took her time coming - you'd have thought this was her first baby, too!

Been delivering babies since she was a baby, but I had to help her. I had a time that night and every time I told Greenlee something, I had to say it twice! Oooh, she aggravated me. Well, the baby got born, like they gen'ly do, and I watched everything that silly nurse did. (Dizzy as she was, somebody had to watch her.) So, I saw the baby come; saw it had a veil, which didn't surprise me, since I come here with a veil, at least, that's what they say. (Used to be a lot of babies born like that.)

If you can't believe your own Momma, who can you believe? My Mother (God rest her soul) said I came with a veil; she told me what it looked like - that's how I knowed what I was looking at. That silly nurse acted like she saw a big snake or something. So, I told her what it was, and told about my veil when I was born, and how cold it was the night I was born. Least, that's what they tell me. But - people don't appreciate what you do for them. Still, I do what I can, for my kin. And I still say, it was a good thing I was there that night. Else, that niece *might* not've got here.

Lutecia Brown 1840-1986

a conjure woman with an attitude

They called me a two headed woman when I was just a girl.
Called me two-headed, when I was too young to know
what they meant, but I found out!

When I got to Gainesville - never you mind now, from where-
I liked it. So I set up my practice, and my sign, a red hand.
Some kids called me "The Red Lady" (really I am quite black).
Some close friends called me "Red." My customers, though,
called me "Miz Lutecia, ma'am," and at that, they better say it
right or I would see red in a minute and fix it so they couldn't
see nothing else. I useta warn people - "Don't trouble the Spirits;
don't you think about getting on my nerves." But some would.
Dojesus, some just would.

But like I say, I went ahead and set up. No, never told even my good
buddy Sam why I didn't go to Cornelia. Truth is, Cleo
had it going on, up there, and I knew that before I got here.
(I told you now - where I come from ain't your business.)

They knew I was a two-headed woman and was glad about it, too.
They knew, but this one n — , Claude. Y'all know him. Got all up
in my face, and both me and him thought he was cute. I will
say that. Well, we was friends, at first. I'd listen to him tell his
dreams. He wanted him a good woman, he said, not one like his
Ma. He wanted a house full of boys and then, he changed his tune.
And mine.

Shouldn't have listened, but I did.

You know, even a two headed woman can get weak in the head
(and the knees) sometimes. Well, things happened like they happened.
He sung that tune all the way into my bed, then changed it, again.
Said he just wondered what a conjure woman's . . .
stuff was like. He said that, to my face! And laughed.

I saw red so bright,
I thought my brain had exploded.
I saw red, *heard* red, and tasted red, choking me. Claude now,
getting dressed, telling me this woman he found from Cornelia. How
she gone have all them boys for him. Then my throat eased
up and I just laughed. And laughed.

Girls is all he got from that woman. Oh - I didn't bother *her* but
I fixed him. Even acted friends with
him, so I could hear *all* about it. How he couldn't stop drinking.
Couldn't keep a job. Didn't understand his wife (and couldn't treat
her right). Couldn't get no boys. I still saw red.
And kept laughing.

He brought his kids to see me, once. (He showed them like
prize pigs.) The oldest one wore a red jacket.
I pointed at her and said "Don't you ever come around me wearing
red! Don't you never wear red again!"
But it was more than the color. She had the Sight.
And I could see, in her, my competition. That's if I let her be.
She scared me (so I had to scare her) and she was only about six.
Well, Claude I fixed. He had bad, bad, blood-red dreams. He died,
in his own red blood, in the street near my house. He knew, just
before he died, why and who done it. And even now,
thirty years later, he ain't got no peace.



Tanya

Sandra

Maggie

Doris &
Audrey

Dolores

Newtown was a part of Gainesville

which was, I reckon, farther
away from old town! Right where Desota Drive
cut across another street and turned a curve
into Laura's store. If you ran into it, or
slammed the door too hard, you'd knock it down.
A brown, wooden house with a raggedy
half-screened porch, leaning sideways.
Real dark inside and full of people and smells,
especially sour dill pickles. Just ask anybody.
They know where it is. Right there, at the beginning
of Newtown.

one storekeeper

By me running this store,
me and my wife, long as we
have, we know everybody in town.
And I'm telling you, we get some
strange customers, sometimes.

Early one morning, here come this
little girl running in the store, out
of breath, like a dog or something
was after her. I grabbed
my stick but she grabbed me, crying
and stuttering. She didn't wanna be
late for school but her momma sent
her to get six eggs and she slapped
the dime on the counter. (Well suh!)
I put 'em in a papersack; she lit out
of here - running. Few minutes later,
she's back, crying about they broke (I
coulda told her that) and she wanted
six more - for the same dime! I got mad,
then I got tickled. She just
didn't know
no better.

Then, there was the monkey
family, regular customers, too.
Seven or eight of them; daddy,
momma and children, all looked
like monkeys. No, no I am not
calling them ugly. They just
looked *exactly* like monkeys, and
they grinned all the time.

Fannie Mae, #289

Who? Why, yes, I know Lutecia. How can I *not* know Lutecia, by her and me being neighbors since God invented dirt. When we was first married, John and me stayed with her a while. (Yeah. Yeah we did, Fan.) Not that I wanted to but back then you stayed where you could - if you take my meaning - so we stayed with her. Well, I heard what people said about her. Yes, they called her a witch.

She might have been, and she might not. People will say anything and around here, they will do anything they big enough to do. Especially if they think nobody's looking. So, she *might* have been a witch. Anybody might be. Just because she *look* like one, don't mean she is one. But I tell you what - ole stinky Joe Harris, with all them goats - he smell like a witch, or something just as bad.



Goatman Joe Harris

I got your goats.

Say, yeah, I *got* goats.

Raise goats, chickens, vegetables,
children, and a little Legba, too, if the moon is
right and if I feel like it.

My goats sweet. (Got little tinkly bells on 'em so
they don't even smell.) I don't let just anybody in
my business, either, but

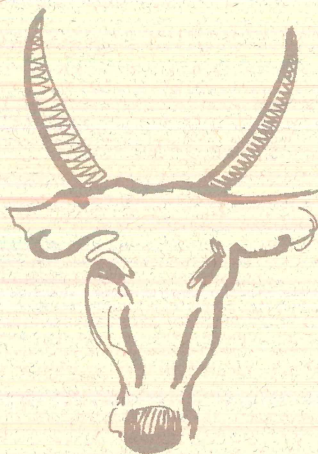
sometimes, people do see. & I don't know what
got into me, that day. Wasn't in *that* much hurry. A
car stopped in the middle of Collins Street about
dinnertime. I had my five goats and the wagon.

We went through the car - in one back door and out
the other one. Goats, wagon, and all.

Just a little joke. Didn't take but a minute. One of
Claude's little girls (they all got big eyes) saw it.

No, not the oldest, another one. She was too young
to say anything - just blinked. But she saw it.

Me and my goats, Legba, moving on through.



Fannie Mae, #1,001

Well, if Susie had asked me,
before she shot her husband,
I could've told her. It wouldn't
do a bit of good. Not in
the head, where she shot him.
You can't hurt no man by shooting him in
the head! You got to get 'em somewhere else,
where they can feel it. Me, I'd of shot him in
the leg, stomach or foot. See what
happened? About a week after Susie shot
him, he was carrying on just like hadn't
nothing happened! Next time, she better do
I say, and aim at his leg.
Or something!

Anyway, it is too hot to
be bothered with trying to
shoot somebody in the head. Or
anywhere else, for that matter.

Yes, it's hot. It's *too* hot
for this time of year. Keep this up, and I
won't have no beans to put up this year,
either. But
you know what I done, today?
I washed all the kitchen
curtains, and tomorrow - if the
creek don't rise - tomorrow,
I'll iron 'em!



And that's another thing

People in Gainesville
not all that different
from Cleveland, Bean Creek, Cornelia,
Clarkesville, or Toccoa. They cared about
what they cared about. Mainly
each other, and each other's business.
Put a lot of stock, and time,
into looking good, living as good as they could,
and doing the best they could
with what they had.
And they, like the rest of us,
liked where they lived.
Must have. They still there,
ain't they? Unless they dead -
and some of them so nosey, they
still hanging around.

*Who? Who you know
still hanging around,
and been dead? You
start talking that
foolishness, and I'm leaving.
I'm outta here, soon's
you get started,
with that.*

while we on the subject;
Let's tell the rest of it.
(Tell it like it i-s is.)

We were bound, some of us, like being in jail, or on the chain-gang. Yeah. I know what I'm talking about. Something fixed it so you couldn't *think* of nowhere else to be. Couldn't imagine no way else to live when you tried. Lawd, you tried. Scared, though. Scared to go, and hating it the whole time. Hating everything about these hills and valleys. Tell about that,
while you on the subject.)

Mr. Arthur Wright
1873 - 1961

They didn't ask to be born.
Not Claude's, and
nobody's elses.

Too many children
already, without what
they need and they don't need
much - a roof
over their heads,
some beans, some love.

I wasn't born
in slavery, but
close enough
to it to see
what it did to
the little ones.
Hurt me, so bad.
No, I don't have
any children of my
own. Had lotsa wives
if you git my drift, but
no children.

I don't have a lot
to say about my life.
I did what I did, to get by.
I did like we all do, and
when I married
Miz Maggie Wright
well, I had been a
grown man. Had done

some living. But it was
her I wanted to settle
down with. And I
didn't have a lot of kin
so it was easy to take up with hers. Her
sister Susie, and her husband. Her grown
daughter Amy and her carrying ons. Amy's
boy, Claude, though, took some
getting used to. And I
can't say I ever did -
get used to Claude.

If you gone keep having
babies - I'd tell him -
at least take care of them.
At least act like a human sometimes,
I would say.

And his little girls was
just like all kids.
Needed some food,
some love and
they was easy to love.
At least, for me.

Me and Miz Maggie Wright didn't do
no more than anybody else would have.

I just wish
I'd knowed enough
to write down a will
to leave the oldest
girl my house.



Miz Maggie Wright

1883-1969

Well, I guess I 'd thought about "howdy-doody," my pudding dessert, a long time. I always liked children, and wanted some of my own but my first husband - they say I had lots of husbands but I just had two - my first husband, he had something else on his mind. Don't know what else, exactly. And it wasn't til *after* I married him that I saw he was stone-cold crazy, not just silly. Or else, he was silly, *and* crazy. I reckon Claude and his Momma got that honest! My first husband was a sweet deep chocolate man. Ummmm. I can see him just as plain, even now. Had a strong, clear singing voice, and a pretty smile. First time I saw him, he was smiling and singing. He claimed when he first saw me, he knew he was gone have me. For life.

Said he'd worked roots for me, and that's all it was to it. I thought he was just talking - you know how men do. But, after we got married, he kept *on* talking and acting strange. Talking about the moon. The "signs." And he wore me out talking about his dreams and asking me about mine! One time, I couldn't sleep - much less dream - for a week, he worried me so. Claimed he could work roots, and call the Spirits - I'm surprised we had one baby, the way he carried on. So, when my grandson had his kids, well, it was like they was mine. Then too, Arthur Wright is a sweet man (He always called me Miz Maggie Wright). Just like he loved me, and overlooked it when I took a nip now and then, he loved my peoples. We just treated Claude's like they was ours.

About Claude

Claude? Yeah, I knowed him. Knowed him real good. Good as any man could know him. Always talking his jive, drinking, and all the time, he went for bad.

I swear, I believe Claude *invented* woof tickets and when wouldn't nobody buy - he would pick a fight with hisself. Who? I ain't lying. You can ask anybody. They say he was born like that, just evil. At least, Claude claim he was born like that - but I knowed his Momma too. Naw - naw, nothing like that; you know I don't play the dozens like that! Especially not with Miz Amy, not with Claude's momma! Miz Amy said Claude tried to stab the doctor - when he was about three years old, *if* y'all let me finish!

Miz Amy
1904-1954

I told people he would end up on the chain gang
before he got to the first grade in school,
if somebody didn't kill him, first. Because he
was a bad child, from the
start. I had a *bad* time
with Claude's daddy, Claude Senior.
I had a *bad* time, having Claude junior.
& things got *worse*, after that!

And you right. He got that honest, from me.
Folks call Claude uppity but
they ain't seen nothing.
Shoulda seen me in my day, way I
useta strut around. I was *some* kinda fine,
and didn't care who I let know it. Was a smooth
pecan brown til they put me in the ground
and stayed that way !!
My Momma couldn't do nothing with me, no more
than I could, with Claude. I believe to my soul I
was born loving a good time. And no-good, good-
looking, men. Which is just what Claude's daddy
was: no-good, and at that, hi yaller.

Don't know *why* I married him (coulda had my pick)
and after that, we'd fight so much, it's a wonder
Claude wasn't born dead. See,
Claude's daddy didn't want him,
didn't want me to have him; I named the boy
"Junior," out of spite and he is dark complected,
like me. Didn't look nothing like that ole yaller dawg
and *he* tried to say that wasn't his child but I
knowed, and he knowed, it was. But, oooh wee, we'd
fight! Especially once I got to drinking, and once I

started, I kept on going! Then, how he *looked* would make me mad. His face wasn't put together to suit me and I let him know it, too. By the time

Claude was five, we'd split up for good but, chile, we fought. Except for a few breaks to eat, sleep, and the 17 hours it took me to have his baby, we fought, and Claude Jr. saw it, too.

Claude was only about four that day. The doctor was tall, heavyset, yaller. Claude spied him, coming up the path, and lit out running. Claude *did* stab the doctor, in the leg. But then, he said, "I'm sorry. I thought you was my daddy. I'm gone kill my daddy."

Claude Davenport 1928(?) - 1964



In the first place,
I was *born* in Atlanta,
not in this little dump.
And yeah, I drink
much likker as I want to;
I'm a grown man.

And I like me some fine women
with big behinds. That's what I liked
about my wife. (In the Navy? I was just a
cook, but a damn good cook. I'll make you
some of my raw oyster stew, one day.)

Well, I don't know if I planned to marry
her, but she wouldn't give it up, unless I
did. Then, soon's
I touched her, she got pregnant but I say
that first baby she had ain't mine. (Too
light-complected!)

Shhh... I know when I'm lying, & I
do it anyway. I say, I know
when I'm lying. But that don't give
you the right to contradict
nothing I say. "Claude got the Devil in
him,"
my Momma would say. Huh.
The devil *wish* he had some of what I
got. Hell - don't care if Slim had twenty
kids (which, one time, I thought
she might), they'd be mine.
They better be. They'd
have to be. I didn't give her
time to fool with nobody else. I -
I don't have to talk about
me. Ask anybody.

Ethel Mae Gibson

When I saw him first, I thought he was stuck on hisself. He acted like "I'm God's gift to women, and you know it, too." Still, he was cute. He'd been around the world, in the Navy, also to Atlanta. I'd just mainly been to Hollywood, Clarkesville and Clayton and I was just eighteen. Later, even with Daddy listening, Claude would talk his stuff. I tried to act like it didn't phase me none, but it did. It did. Made my bobby socks roll up and down.

Talking about "You got the key to the kingdom" and something about "The woman who can beat yo' time ain't been born and her Momma's dead."

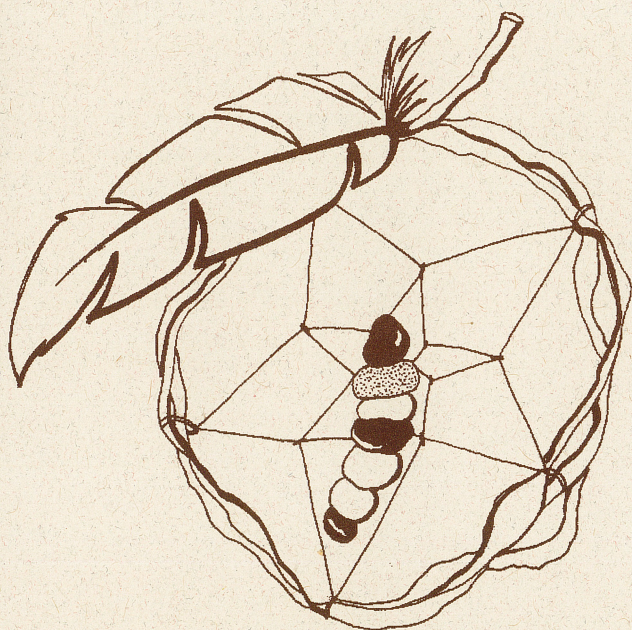
I like riddles.

That's howcome I remember that one. Sounded like a riddle to me, and so I giggled. Then, come to find out, according to my always-got-her-head-stuck-in-a-book daughter, *that* is in a book, published before I was born. That just goes to show you. But still, I liked it. I liked how he looked, too. That's all there was, to that.



PART TWO

Crossroads



Parent-ogenesis

Momma said she met Claude on a bicycle riding
across that field. Asked "exactly where?" she'd
wave her hand at me like
she was fanning flies; she'd go hazy, or get mad.
This is how it was:

Ethel Mae did the Gibson stroll,
slow and lazy through the summer field of
tall golden grass in a long straight beige
dress that made her look and move like a
blade of grass. He was a rich deep brown,
sweating just enough to give the 2 p.m. sun
something to dance off of. He had on some
greenish cacky pants that fit him just
right; even on the bike, when she looked,
she could see - he looked good. Claude
smiled and said something sassy and sweet.
They said enough to know that she was Miz
Shuberg's niece, and he, Miz Maggie
Wright's grandson. Their kinfolk knew each
other so it was alright, then.

They looked at each other
a long time that became
my beginning.

i was created
in an open field
on a late summer's day
in Newtown, Northeast Georgia
brought into being
by sunshine, weeds,
a breeze,
and smiles.

1002 Desota Drive
Newtown, Gainesville
Miz Maggie Wright and Mr. Arthur Wright

At the top of one hill and the bottom of
another streets unpaved and dusty red
dogwood trees, a big flower garden.

Train tracks in back of the house, across a
wide ditch. At train time, when Momma
went from Gainesville to Cornelia
Grandpa & Granny, & Daddy stood in the
backyard waving to us waving back on the
train (Grandpa with a red handkerchief)

Sometimes i stand there, with Grampa and
Granny, and wave, at Momma and my
sisters.

Somebody still

stands there waving.

&

waiting.

103 Soque

According to Daddy John Gibson, when we first met, I said, "You ain't my grampa. He in Gainesville." Momma said, when i first saw the lightbulb hanging from the ceiling, i pointed, and asked "What is that?" (Where we lived, on Collins Street, there was candlelight or a kerosene lamp.)

103 Soque Street. A four room, high-ceilinged white house, at the foot of a hill, behind a small ditch of red dirt; house full of light, noise and more people than i ever saw at one time. Laughing, pinching, poking at me; my fat cheeks, my "she-won't smile" ten aunts and uncles, and Momma Elvie, my other granma. 103 Soque. Soquee.

Mullet Sandwich



Some June or May when i get home Miz Sally will smile and fix my mullet sandwich with mayonnaise on white bread and say, like she always says, "Doris you home! Howlong you gone stay? Where you at now? You shoulda told me so I could have it ready before you got here."

Years ago, Miz Sally had a masectomy or as we put it, she "got a breast cut off," matter of fact like. Like she said it herself. Sometimes, if she felt real tired she'd say, "Y'know, my strength ain't right in that arm, from my surgery." And you'd notice:

one arm was smaller than the other. Still, she moved just as fast, or slow, as ever. Never took days off, just her usual afternoon nap, and always the local switchboard, hollering across the street if someone got a phone call and her hotdogs were always perfect. She never changed anything; the food stayed matter of fact and good, just like her breast was matter of factly gone. Just like Mr. Miller's house.



Like Aunt Kate's and M'evie's with swarms of people in and out talking, laughing, yelling, and growing up to the tune of Miz Sally's jukebox and the rhythm in red clay and honeysuckles. Sue worked for Miz Sally in an Apple-Pickers summer. We danced to Marvin Gaye ("Stubborn Kinda Fellow") in a frozen winter hot with each other. Anybody going in the cafe was inspected by everybody on M'evie's porch. As you walked down Soque Street you got scrutinized and if you were too dressed up somebody might not recognize you and ask "Who was that?" Whoever it was automatically threw up a hand at the house across from Miz Sally's; went on down the hill or in the cafe or stopped at the steps and the movement is eternal. And the motion is still

still i see never forgotten faces
 pat my feet to rhythms gone
 complain at the scrutiny of the people
 and wave my hand goodbye.
 hey. when i come home (again)
 to my mullet sandwich and fresh corn
 from a field never planted anymore,
 to sweetpeas on a vine in front of Aunt Kate's and
 say "Hey, Miz Sally, I'm back!"

know that (somebody)
 i am here to stay
 like the movement on Soque
 like the mullet sandwiches &
 Miz Sally, i move(d) on
 but matter -of-factly-
 here, still.

Country

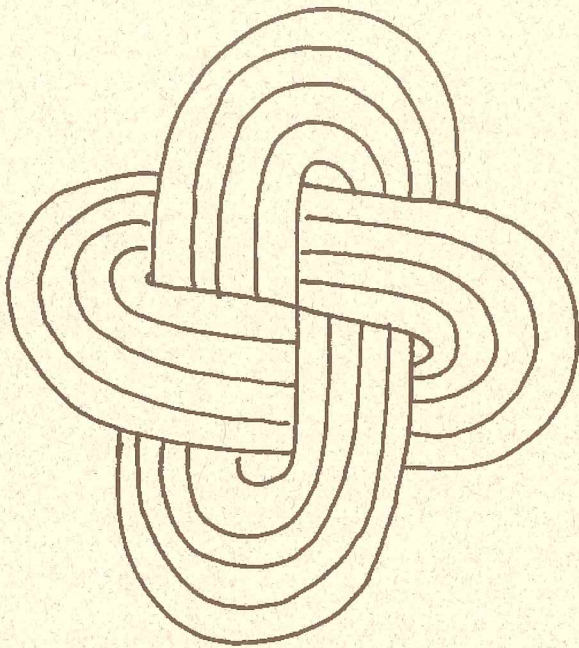
Country: a rural, rather uncivilized area of the USA especially in the South. One who acts backwards, as in, 'country.' No sophistication or knowledge of the outside, the real world. Provincial, limited, myopic, and xenophobic in language, appearance, actions, customs, and belief systems (superstitions, myths, folktales & collective lies).

In photos, they freeze
stiff & formal
shyly dressed in
their country dress-up
clothes. Their faces freeze
into the camera like it might
bite, all emotion erased except
for strong country personalities
too strong to be erased.

Faces un-animated.
Shoulders erect & stiff.
Sunday-best, if possible;
if not, a pose saying "Well, this me.
Take it or leave it."
Every now and then
a face, a child, still grins
an adult caught
about to get stiff
characters so
strong they defy
attempts to make
them one-dimensional, flat . . .

PART THREE

Soque Street



... Because once you turned the corner

and came up Soque Street oh once
you saw that red dirt covered
street sign and started up the hill
it started - soon's you rounded that corner,
headed up the hill nothing
was ever happening: everything is.

Ceremony for 103 Soque Street



Soque is a Cherokee word turned Black on the hill, across the railroad track, in Appalachian foothills, where madness like morning glories took over everyone trying to be insane and acceptable all the time & all the time, hainted.

Two rows of houses along the railroad track;

Mr. Oscar Wise, the Peanut Man, and his family.

Still there, in the air and honeysuckles, hainted.

Mack, our cousin, said he saw a casket roll down Soque.

Stopped in front of 103 & rolled back up the hill, again.

Mr. Miller's wife, & that's all the name she had; been dead for years but we saw her pale, pale face framed by wild colored-Indian black hair pressed against the window pane. At 103 Soque, in the bedroom where most of 18 people slept, a square hole in the ceiling. From that hole, one night, a man in white floated down. He ate the light bulb, floated back up. Anthony and Jeff, 20 years later, saw the lightbulb dance up and down. Good and sober realquick they split. Fish said the man Jimmy saw, sitting over the middle of the well, with no head was his great-granddaddy. He got his head cut off.

Why they stay there, you ask.

How do they live? What is there?



Near no ocean, just Russell Lake,
the other side of & down, down a steep mountain. Nothing
to cause this fog. Thick, wet blinding fog when fall
softened the already quiet hill leaves fell muffled & slow
in animated fog. In that fog they dream silence dreaming
each other. In that fog, one walked out at night and never told
what she saw but Miz Cleo knew the fog in the trees, in & out
the leaves, winds with wordless voices, distinct, endless.
The red dirt hums the overgrown trees chant the background,
calling. Red dirt reaches up, the trees down, meet in minds in the
same dream. Dreaming they are real.

Outsiders and foreigners claim disbelief at a big red apple for
the downtown monument; say no highways come near us; So,
we don't exist, to them who can't touch a belief that recreates
each other, each day, & in sleep, dream the same dreams.
Red dirt inflected pine trees scented dreams.

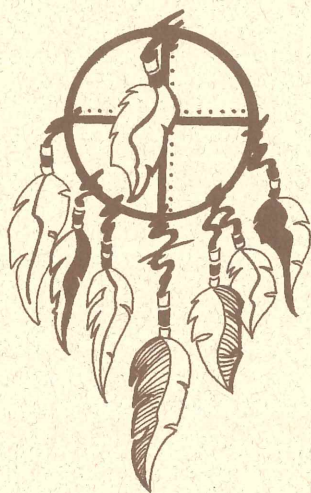
Like my brother Anthony, when he was about 5? He got out of
bed and came on the front porch at 103 Soque Street, full of
people & peed off the porch & walked back inside. Our
loud laughter did not wake him. No laughter will wake us.



We shared dreams & short memories. Dreams, memories, and
amnesia. At the end of school we always "went somewhere,"
a bus full of excited children in May. headed to the Indian Reservation
in North Carolina each time like the first time, except
a few jaded ones
("Oh shoot! the Indians again?") but

WE were a reservation, on Cherokee land.
On a beautiful hill of apartheid,
reserved for "the coloreds"
& though many of us honestly had Indian blood
we had short memories, dreams and amnesia.

The Cherokee *could* have traveled
to Northeast Georgia to look at us
making, not beads and moccasins, no Touristy
Attractive stuff, just inventing each other
repeatedly on Soque Street with names like
Wolf. Drunk Dessa. Mr. Rat. Mr. "Poppa" Doc.
Mr. Jim Smith. "The Elephant Killer," Miz Zelma.
Miz Cleo. If someone wanted to see our
ritual stompdowns they'd find
Fred's Tavern or Sally's Lunchroom or another
joint back in the woods you'd need permission
(and a guide) to get to & once you got to it, you
couldn't leave . . . like Miz Cleo.



Cleo Smith

1893-1977

By the time we got to Banks County, it was hard enough. Bad enough, my leaving Charleston. But Jim - my brother - had to leave.

And I was some tired. Riding, riding, riding that wagon up into a land crowded with pine trees, hills, mountains, and a few strange funny sounding people; by the time we got to that hill, in this place called Cornelia, I told Jim this was the place.

If he could just do like I said, *this* was it. It was, and has been for 100 years; yet and still I remember my other home and when it started:



It was hot hot that day, playing out back with my five sisters, half naked too young to cover what we didn't have. So hot, could smell each other's heat & that raggedy doll two of my sisters fighting over, so hot it almost melt I laughing, don't want that doll noway except to bury it maybe poke sticks in its glassy no-color eyes I laugh at my two younger sisters - some other sister singing one just yelling like any other hot summer day but then I turn quick and see our Momma sister, Aunt Zese stand there quiet-quiet in too many black clothes she always wear just stand there, stare us silent; silent too, my Momma come after her.

Aunt Zese point slow, raise her arm
her finger at me,
"She the one." I start crying
saying Momma it not me. It
them - making fight over ugly doll.
making noise, it NOT me!

"Shhh," Momma say.
"Come on in the house." I go in the house.
I go to Aunt Zese house and I
- what I know - almost twelve. From that day,
that heat still on me now,
I live with my Aunt Zese, in her house, on her island off
Charleston.



When the moon full up we do certain thing.
Moon gone, sky dark-dark I
do other things Aunt Zese tell me. I grow.
We dance. Aunt Zese make the movements in her body
my body follow words, chants,
many drums, not many years later I become what
my Aunt Zese said. I was the one.
I am the one.

They say in town & on the island,
"Cleo the one. She see she talk with
the Spirits."

...& all over Charleston they'd wait for the
few days I take boat over to
see Momma, to go to market,
all the men wait & watch me walk -
some women watch, too, like my Dina.
And didn't nobody never get out they place.
They knew. I was the one.

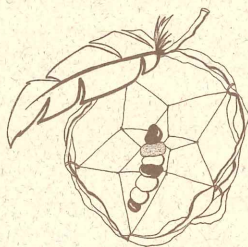
And I might still be there with Dina
but I had to save my brother's life.



Don't even remember why we headed for North Georgia except it
had to be far enough away from
the two-headed doctor's powers and his daughter
that Jim was messing over. So I left, & I took the
Spirits with me. They saw this
red dirt and mixed with it.
Mixed me with it, and what I wanted
made no nevermind. After that, I liked it. Just fine.

But I was some tired, and halfway
evil, at first. This little no-sidewalk place
and the people, what few it was, lived in shacks
and one conjure woman, back in the woods,
power 'bout shriveled up
but I paid my respects. And Jim did
what I told him. We live in the big
yellow house at 303 Third Street
at the crossroads of Third and Soque.

And I spoke on them all: got them all dreaming the same dream
like I dream of Dina in my blood.
They feel everything I felt for my Dina,
and other things I never
thought to feel for nobody, too.
The power of the word binds them, and anybody
else come through here, too.



Míz Zelma (Shankle) Crow

Sept. 28, 1908-June 29, 1989

If you just hush and listen to somebody besides you sometimes, you'd do better. (You'd be better off and I b'lieve you'd look better, too.) Where we came from don't make a bit of difference in this world - don't care what Doc Williams say. Not by now, it don't. He talking about Wilkes County; well, they wont no different in Chicago, either. You pay attention now: it's some people done forgot they human. You got to make them remember or make them know *you* human. It's some of us like that too. Yes it is. Yes it is. Some right here on the hill. Just like my second husband.

People *will* try you. But Zelma Crow don't take no stuff off nobody. Cleo? Naw, she never did try to mess with me. I knowed 'em, too, when they lived in Banks County. One time, she asked me if I wanted - well, I didn't. And what she was doing, had already been done. Before she came here, the Indians owned all of this - all of Georgia! Owned some of us, too. Oh yes, they did too. I told Cleo not to mess with the Spirits. (Don't trouble the spirits, and they will leave you alone.) Remember that. Because some spirits is spiteful. Just as spiteful as the day is long. They don't mess with Zelma Crow, neither.



Elvira Juanita Smalls (1923)

Elvira Gibson, Evie, Momma Elvie, M'evie

All I could do was hold onto that horse.
I stood next to it, holding the leash.
But it felt like it had run
away from a snake and was trying to

throw me but I was standing on the ground,
in my momma's yard, in Hollywood, that coulda been
a hole I was falling into. It was a hole. & because
I wanted to fall I held on to that horse and

made my body extra still, my face extra flat because no
body, no man had flustered me
like that and I wanted him.
I wanted him, bad. So, I had to hold on.

Sure, I knowed of him - who didn't - him and
his brothers all (Jess, Will, Ellis, and him - John)
four of them, and even, they 5-6 sisters but it
was the brothers everybody

talked about. No good rounders, but they was
good looking, and two of them
could sang, and play banjo real good. I knowed enough
to know not to go nowhere round them, even

without my momma saying not.
And I had been to Tuskegee. Didn't like it.
All flat, dirty dirt- and what I look like, anyway,
being a school teacher?

But when I saw him
I liked what I saw
So, I held on
to that horse . . .
just as tight as my arms
and my thighs
held him,
not much later than when I
first saw him,
grinning and sweating,
in my momma's yard,
that summer.



John Alexander Gibson

April 24, 1897-March 27, 1982

I *know* I was a fool
for Elvie. When I
first seen her, never will
forget it, the first time. She
had long black hair, hanging
down her back, just like a
hoss's tail, just as long as that
hoss she was standing next to.
Why - you know she got Indian
blood in her! She lookeded
just like a Indian, that day.
The prettiest girl around in
five counties. I sho' was a
fool, for that woman.



"Bound Georgia"

"Bound Georgia!" the Kernel
(Colonel Howard) used to shout
at any children who got in his way;
an ugly-mean look on his face.
"Bound Georgia" was an order.
& they'd better respond, quick, and right.

"Georgia bounded on the north by Tennessee and North
Carolina on the west by Alabama on the south by Florida
and on the east by South Carolina and the
Atlantic Ocean" and if they got that
right, they could be ordered to bound Cornelia. Or
Habersham County. Or even, America. But

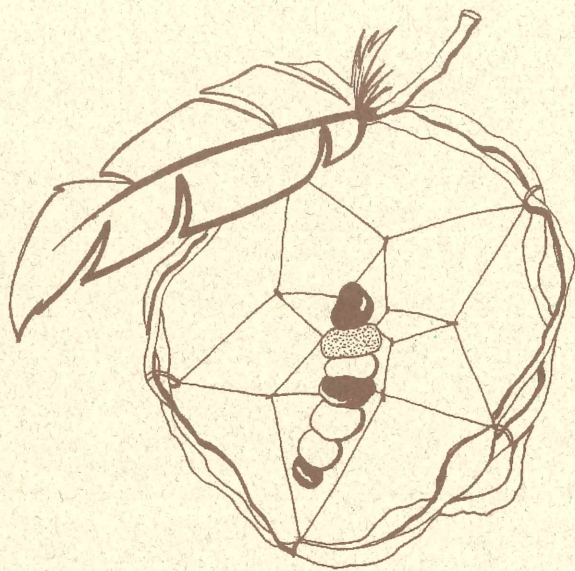
all they *needed* to know was
bound. Bound to and in that hill, in
Cornelia. Surrounded by
mountains, trees and people bound somewhere
else then bound, there.
What they knew was "bound."

Whether intense dislike or
absolute love, same difference.
Passion, real and natural
as the summer wild roses and sweetpeas,
intense like the ice storms every winter.

They prayed with passion.
Worked, partied, fought, killed, lived and died with
passion and the Gibsons even ate food passionately.

Like that time when 5-7 of them decided
not to be virgins no more.
Now, the trick was, who to give
it up with who wasn't their kin.
No choice but to do somebody else's brother
while she did yours, or your cousin, or
your uncle (Mr. Rat looked for Glory at sundown with
a shotgun so she wasn't in this) like that time. They
agreed; they planned & met next day to tell it.

Passion, is my point. And they
did everything
the same way.



dawn

somewhere a

rooster crows. the hill

turns (peacefully)

in it's imagined sleep turns

dreams (out) into

morning morning glories

moistness of dew fog

unbecomes gently, gently

“Connect these bones / these dry bones...”

Foot bone connected to
the ankle bone, ankle bone connected
to the leg bone. Leg bone connected
to the thigh bone to the hip bone . . .
back bone
now, back up.

Somebody ready to get an attitude, ready to ask
“well, which one of these bones you calling me? Which one?
'Cause I ain't gone be nobody's back bone. Now, is I, ni, ni, ni.
Now, is I? Naw, Naw I ain't and” like that. Somebody already
decided which one of the bones you won't
be, and ain't even got no say in it.

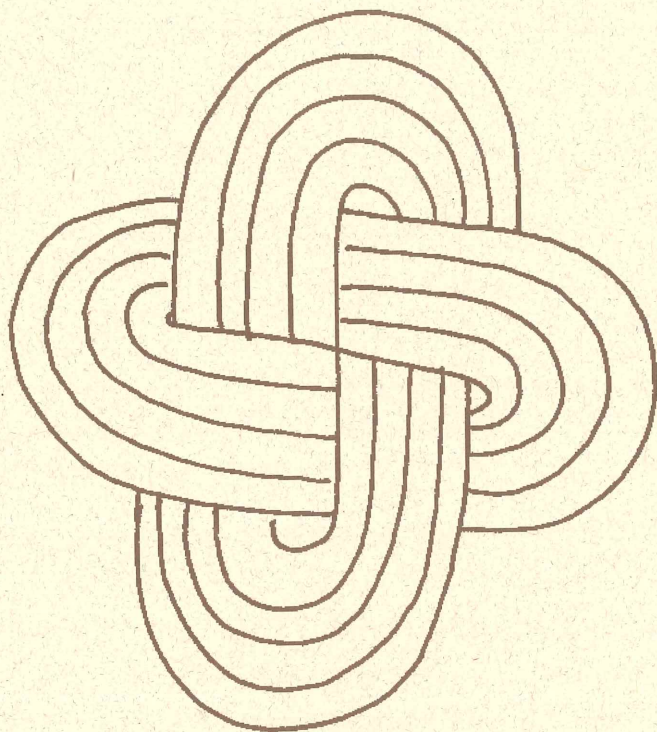
Connected, these bones,
by blood, mixed and remixed
by kin close and kissing bound
and connected:

The Williams connected to the Crows connected
to the Perrys connected to the Tutts connected.
Williams, connected to the Banks, connected to the
Pettijohns, to the Mosses, to the Willinghams, connected to the
Scotts, Smiths, Dooleys, Fortsons; Miz Ion, the Wests, Davises,
Gibsons connected to the Gobers; Ruckers, Trimiars, Mattoxos.
Connected to the Kings; Andersons, Pruitts, Coles, Dorseys,
Griffins, Wilmonts, Martins. Miz Sally connected. Dovers. We all
connected to Miz Sally, connected to the Hamiltons (Mr. Jim Smith,
one time), the Millers, the Stricklands, the Harrises, and Miz Texas
she connected, too. Heard's, Primers, Nicelys. Cooks, and most
of us kin to Miz Cook & Miz Franklin.

Mr. Pervin. Miz Minnie Belle. Miz Lillian. Mr. Bill Anderson and
Miz Mayellen. Mr. Ernie Turk. Miz Mary Turk. Mr. Oscar Wise
nem. Mr. Rat. Bobby Williams. Miz Icie. Mr. Hubert. Miz Ruthaleen
& Mr. Robert. Miz Emma and Mr Crawford Brock. Miz Josie. Miz

Nettie Mae. Mr. Pope. Miz Lulamae. L.C. Scott. Mr. Freeman &
Miz Maggie Dover. Mr. Buddy Williams. David & Faye Willingham.
Mr. Howard Moss. Miz Jeannie Heard. Mr. Joe Banks. Mr. Hubert
Wilmont. Mr. Giles Griffin and Miz Clara. Robert Primer,
Harold Davis. Miz Chunk; Miz Dora Scott. J.B. Bronner. Thomas
Kidd. Irene Trimiar. Mr. Beamon Chavis. Mr. Estee Banks. Mother
Gracie Gibson Banks. Miz Sosebee. Harryjune Fortson.
Mr. Sam Pettyjohn. Will, Katie,
Elvira and John Gibson

connected. By blood, by kin, by who
you don't even want to think about, much less
admit y'all got the same you know what I'm talking about, exactly
what I mean. Connected. By blood, by kin, by dreaming
the same dreams. Being in the same dreams
connected. And bound.



Cornelia Regional (Colored) High School



The Bean Creek Rabun County School Bus
never did get in until *after* the Lord's Prayer
and the Pledge Allegiance.

You could count on it. Or they'd hold
the pledge and prayer until Rabun Co. came; sometimes didn't come
if it was a bad freeze up the mountains or farming time
(Don't know what they farmed. Red dirt? Pine trees? Clouds?).
When they got in, we watched to see
whatever we could see. Oh - the people
were mainly pretty but we *did* grow some
ugly up in these hills. & we'd wait for *them* to come,
to see if they'd got any uglier
since yesterday.



Lunchtime. Time of intense terror and
joy. Joy, because Miz Maggie Dover
could lowmo' cook.

For a quarter (if you had it. if not,
baloney on white bread in a greasy
brown papersack, dry peanut butter or
a cold fatback sandwich) and if you *had* a
quarter, you got to look forward to
Miz Maggie's lunch.

Fried fish, chicken and dumplings,
stewed chicken, brunswick stew, rolls &
greens. Peach cobbler, with real
crisp brown dough on top.

We ate everyday like it was Sunday.

Except for the terror:

one of them girls from across the ditch
might take your lunch & slap your face, too.

※

Friday afternoon one-hour "socials."
a record player, the latest 45's
and a few oldies the boys
played with boys;
the girls danced with girls,
in fourth and fifth grades
the teachers chaperoned,
changed records, checked watches
waiting for time to go

**HABERSHAM COUNTY
HIGH SCHOOLS**

Cornelia Colored
Name of School

TERM AND YEARLY REPORT OF

James Gibson
Pupil's Name

11
Grade

F. Kay
Homeroom Teacher

1958-59
School Year

Miz Sara Mae Pennix / Mrs. S. M. Cook

Well, I got assigned to Cornelia Regional just out of college and couldn't say no. I needed the job. Momma, back home in North Carolina, needed the money. Besides I wanted that job and I wanted to be a credit to the race, and where it would do some good; as far as it was in my power to do so, God-willing. And these folk was heathens, if I ever saw heathens. Oh, they had a church; two in fact, and one in Mt. Airy, and Rev. Strickland preached hard at them. But the people was just -wild! That's what I thought at first, but you know, I look back, and I have to laugh. Some nerve I had! I once told my students (I taught 3rd through 5th) they ought to change the bed sheets once a week. And that I planned to check on them. Just walk in, *throw* the blanket back, and see. I had *some* nerve.

But soon, I found me a sweetie, Garland. I married him. The dirt was red, like back home. The hills, the air, and everybody was right friendly. I loved my students. Even now, I can see how that first group looked, where each one sat in class. Well, it wasn't too long before I was one of them "heathens." I have taught school here for almost forty years! And lived here - Cook and me, our two children - at the top of Soque, just as long. I was assigned to Cornelia but *then*, well, I guess I'd just call it love. And I'm just very thankful for how the Lord have brought me out.

Miss Robbie M. Franklin

You can not get too familiar
with some people.
If you play with a puppy,
it will lick you in the face.
And, I made sure
these little people understood that
about me. My students were all
afraid of me - as they should've been.
A few of them hated me - or,
thought they did. As an alumnus
of South Carolina State, I had high, high
standards to uphold; my students
upheld them too.

They cringed, when they came to
me, for high school English and
French. Oh - I heard their little stories;
I laughed in their faces. And
many of them actually
fascinated me. Uh huh.
They really did.

Indeed, I had high standards!
Appearance to deportment, it was
imperative that I
did and I taught them, by
precept and by example; the way I carried
myself, and how I dressed (because all of
my sorors and I were known for looking good.
Uh huh, we really were). Unlike some others,
I socialized only with those in my class, not with
those for whom I wished to set an example.
Familiarity breeds contempt, so I had my
Chivas Regal with Sara Mae or another peer; I
never socialized with my children. But I taught.
Oh yes - I taught, and I'd tell them,
"You're gone remember
Robbie M. Franklin." And right now,
most of them on the hill
would thank me for it.

Sally's Lunchroom

Every Sunday after morning service, they'd go to Sally's like the sermon sent them.

You might burn in
hell for your sins, but you'd
go to Sally's first like the Saturday nighters came
to hang over bacon, eggs, and grits;
eyes with a smile, leftover from last night
as the good church folk walked self-
righteously in to condemn what they'd done
a few years or hours before.
Young folk came waiting to
grow up and get a ride to Mt. Airy, to
Fred's Tavern every day but Sunday.

*put on yo high heel sneakers
cause we steppn out tonight
put on yo high heel sneakers
we steppn out tonight . . .*

- You gone put on some clothes?
- Might's well.
- Well, I'll meet you at the top
of the hill, about 8.

*put on yo red dress, baby.
we steppn out tonight . . .*

Fred's Tavern

There really was an age limit, kind of, for the beer joint. (Just sold beer, maybe some cheap wine - by it being a dry county.) And Fred knew your parents, knew just when you was born - where, and how long it took. We didn't much *have* "identification" besides what we knew about each other. And we all *knew* about all there was *to* know, about each other. So, Fred had a way of keeping folk out.

"Naw. naw. I know yo' Momma, and she don't want you in here," Fred might say. Some folk never did get in, even when they got big enough to do everything they wanted, to - *not* at Fred's Tavern. But that was mainly boys. It was different for girls.

If they was *female* & filled out, if they smiled at him anyway, and got there before or after his wife brought his lunch or dinner; if they got there when his wife wasn't there, and some folks knew *exactly* when that was, women from about thirteen on, could get in, and get over. After a while, he'd put quarters in the juke box, to watch some young flesh move around the floor. After awhile, one of the girls say, "Buy us a beer, Mr. Fred." and he might. Or he might not, depending on his mood, how many he'd done already bought that day.

"Fattening f-f-f-f- frogs for jodjammed snakes," he'd say. "I ain't f- f- f- fattening no frogs for snakes." but he did, anyway.
Anyway, at Fred's



jukebox music
a pig foot, and a bottle of beer.
To be precise,
a Champale and a
pickled pigfoot,
wrapped in wax paper, & held
just so, so a little
juice could leak out
& run down y'r hand
& arm, so then, you
had to lick it off.

Mr. PapaDock Williams

1877-1984

When I died I was the oldest man living, in Cornelia, even if by then I didn't live in Cornelia, I did. I do. At the top of the hill, at 121 Soque Street.

Haints can't hurt you. Whether I believe in them or not, don't matter. They can't hurt you. And anyway, they was here in this house before I got here. Plus, I was through running. From haints, or anything else.

Came up here from Wilkes County, me and my wife and a few of our oldest kids. Round 19 and 15 or so, it might have been. Thought for awhile, would have to keep on moving, else kill somebody, til these crackers got it through their head my wife is colored, same as me. Tried to lynch me first, though. Huh. I was tired, and through running. I say, I was through with running - that kind, anyhow. Found this little place, back in the woods (a little past Mt. Airy). Not many people out there but me and mine; Dub King's and a few more. They called it Dogtown, then, and after awhile I moved down here on the hill. Half the people in town my kin, or kin to my kin, one.

Yeah, I done seen some things. With my own eyes and after I lost my sight too, I seen more than you ever will. Knowed ever one of my peoples, too, even if I couldn't see 'em. My daughter, Lean, tried to sneak up on me and fool me, and one of my grands, Becky. They never could do it, and Lean never was right in the head, especially after she married John's oldest boy. Had to be crazy, to marry him. John's kids and mine would fight each other every day. Soon's they saw each other, they'd throw rocks til they got close enough to fight. Reckon Jack hit Lean in the head with a rock. Guess she thought it was a little love tap.

"Dock" ain't my real name, either, but you can't find nobody to tell you different. And I ain't gone tell you no different now, either. Yeah, Demorest ain't the only place and you know it ain't. When they run off (or killed off) all the Indians in Georgia, they started right in on us! But me - I'm hard to kill! Lost one of my legs, lost my eyesight too. Didn't matter. I *still* lived longer than most people do, and I *did* some living. I died when I got ready to.

I was not "passing through" here, like Cleo said. I was running. And when I got to Dogtown, after I stopped laughing, I stopped running.

"in the evening / when the sun / go down"

chuck pot roast
with carrots, onions,
potatoes;
pinto beans, & fried chicken.
greasy greens, with cornbread;
(buttermilk with cornbread,
in a tall glass)
pig feet 'n pig ears. fried whiting.

"How long has that evening
train been gone?" somebody
walking home, slow,
sings loud 'n sweet. children
playing on the bank of the railroad track,
eating green plums,
making noise, called in,
"You, Becky! Git on home!"
soft laugh of women
at the clothesline

of a man strolling
from a little visit, before
suppertime. one

girl reads a
school book on the
back porch.
a woman in a porchswing
hums to herself
this song

The Grand Theater * Cornelia, GA 1959

Bobbie Mae swears, to this day, she got pregnant with her son up there in the balcony in the Grand Theater. Say he *love* television because the screen at the show marked him. His favorite food is popcorn; his first word was "poppa" but he meant "popcorn," not his daddy, & that's just *one* of the balcony-courtiers who would halfway tell the truth.

For the people on the hill, a side door and the balcony. (The non-coloreds went in the front door, sat downstairs, and paid more.) For a quarter, or fifty cents if over 12, they saw the latest double feature every Saturday.

Under-12's in groups, for the matinee. Teenagers and grown people around dusk dark strolled slowly down the hill holding hands to make sure everybody saw. Like Pank and Winnie Hazel. Louise Gibson and James King. Looreel and Claude King.

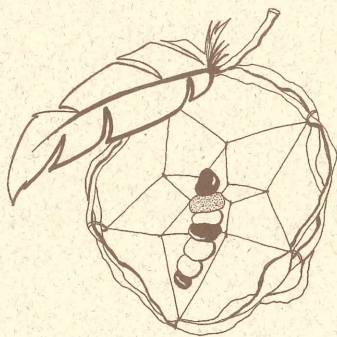
Married couples, too, every Saturday. Came from Cleveland, Clarkesville, Bean Creek, Clayton *every* Saturday through the side door, to the balcony; ordered greasy buttered popcorn for a dime from the noncolored ticketseller, & then, back up the dark, dark stairs. To the balcony's hardwood seats. A few, like Jackie Gibson, dropped popcorn or ice below & got evicted; we hoped they *would* get evicted; they was a part of the show.

We knew that. Just like we knew why
everything was like it was but that was

beside the point.

The point was to get to the balcony. To act
out *our* technicolor drama against the black &
white screen and

when the lights came up, some people were
stuck together. others, tried to
get it together: hair all wild, eyes
crazy looking, blouse & shirt sticking
out every which way; faster ones got it
all back together, smiling; the under 12
crowd grinning days later, talking
about who they saw
at
the Grand Theater
in Cornelia
in 1959.



The Vampire Speaks

Yeah, that was me. One of them stampeding out the Grand Theater, that night. I ran down the steps, pushed everybody out the way & kept on running til I got home and locked all the doors and windows. But it didn't do no good. I wanted to sleep with Momma but she told me if I didn't quit acting so stupid, she'd slap me. (And she could do some slapping.) First, she thought some of the ditchers was after me, so scared, all I could do was stutter plus I was outta breath from running up Soque Street. She kept saying "Which one? Who? Who?" and shaking me, my head was shaking too, but I finally made it go sideways *no* it wasn't the ditchers. Then, she thought maybe some whiteboys had got after me, they would, sometimes, when

the show was out, & they ain't had nothing else to do. Run you as far as the railroad tracks but it was a good idea to just keep running, anyhow - you never know - All this was happening real fast, now, y'understand, and I'm about to fall out & already I could hear people laughing at me tomorrow but I didn't care. I finally got out a few words and that's when Momma got mad & real disgusted (and stayed that way, for the rest of her life) with me. Kept sucking her teeth, flicking her eyes over me head to toe, and "You a almost-grown man! You need to quit yo' foolishness!" So I just went on to bed & never told her, & nobody else, til now. But I never will forget it.

Ain't likely to forget it. "The Bride of Dracula" with Cristopher Lee. And when he showed his fangs and growled, I *took* off. (And I ain't the only one ran. For one, Philip Gibson ran, one time, from "Psycho.") Look like he was coming right after me. And he did. Or something did.

And all the crosses and garlic I bought didn't do no good. (Tried to find some "holy water," like in the show, but never did.) A few months later, when I still went out in daylight, I tried to tell folks I was a vampire. They laughed at me. Didn't nobody believe. They just say I'm crazy. Else, just too lazy and trifling to get a job ("He ain't crazy; he just sorry.") You probably don't believe it either. But *I am a vampire*. And telling you this won't do no good, either.

one sane person

See? See what I mean? They strange.
Like the winter of '63 ; worse ice storm
we had in 50 years. Pearlie Belle sat up
in Sally's for a week, playing that
same record, "Stubborn Kinda Fellow,"
over and over. Same week, Pope got
so drunk, he called a taxi to go home,
two doors up from the cafe.
Then that one fool
thinking he a vampire, instead a just
a real ordinary fool. &
them others - talking about haints, & folks
putting spells on 'em - & they will
come right out & tell you, they *believe* .
Me? No I do not. No, I was not born like
this, either, with my left leg like this.

It happened one Sunday.
I was walking along behind Cleo Smith
looking at her behind &, well,
I fell in the ditch. Twisted my foot, clean around.
That's the truth. Ah, I can tell. You been listening
to them fools. I can tell by that look
on y'r face. How she gone give me
the evil eye, and she in *front* of me? I slipped
in the ditch. My foot turned backwards. *See?*
Except me, everybody
up on that hill *is* crazy.
Or foolish, one.

Míz Willie Hamilton

Well, I could tell the Gibsons apart, just like my own. Evie, John, and me raised them all together. My Babe, Rudolph, Roy Jr., Vic and later, Anne. Anne with Gladys & Kookie and Harvey. Vic & Rudolph & Babe - along in there with Ethel Mae, Herman, Gene and Paul. They all played together; John yelled at mine just like he did at his. Tell them what not to do, they was bound to do it. After Anne (and she was a surprise) after her, I stopped. But Elvie kept right on, with Philip and Kitty. Then too, she had a headstart, with Jack. Paul was the quiet one, and one of my favorites. But I could tell who was who. The one always getting beat was not Sarah; that was John's pet. Many's the day I stopped him, yelling down there, "John, leave that child alone." But Sarah? Naw - she couldn't do no wrong and plus, she'd faint on you, in a minute.

Mack, Will & Kate's boy, would faint too, but mostly in church, when the spirit hit him. But seem like he knew how to break that fall on wood floors, in the Methodist church. Mack stopped that too, in the new church; knew better than to fall out on hard concrete. Sarah, though, didn't care. She'd faint anywhere. Ethel Mae always helped Elvie with the rest of them - by her being the oldest girl. We all worked hard. In the garden, killing hogs and possums. Washing clothes. Look like to me, we put out a big washing every day.

"Gunsmoke" on Soque Street

Look out. Look out now.
They done got a
teevee down to the house!
John down there
talking *back* to the people in
the tv. (I swear fo God! Hope
God may strike me dead!) Telling
Mat Dillon what to do. Now, he
oughta know, if Miss Kitty can't
tell him, Mat won't listen to him -
that's even if he *could* hear him.

Done got 'em a television!
The last ones on the
hill to get one. (They
still had fireplace heat,
way after everybody else had
stoves. Got a woodstove
when everybody else burned coal.)
All 21 of 'em,
crowded up in front of that
little black and white tv,
with the littlest, shortest ones
setting in the front.
So many, they'd take
turns watching and tell each
other about the part they
didn't see! (I swear.) Kitty Lou, now,
named for Miz Sally's sister named Kitty,
the one that could draw and lived upnorth,
but naw, Kitty wanna act like
she named after Miss Kitty on *Gunsmoke* !
Crazy people down there, what I mean.
Plus, I don't know why they even needed a tv;
everybody else was watching *them*.

Death on Soque Street

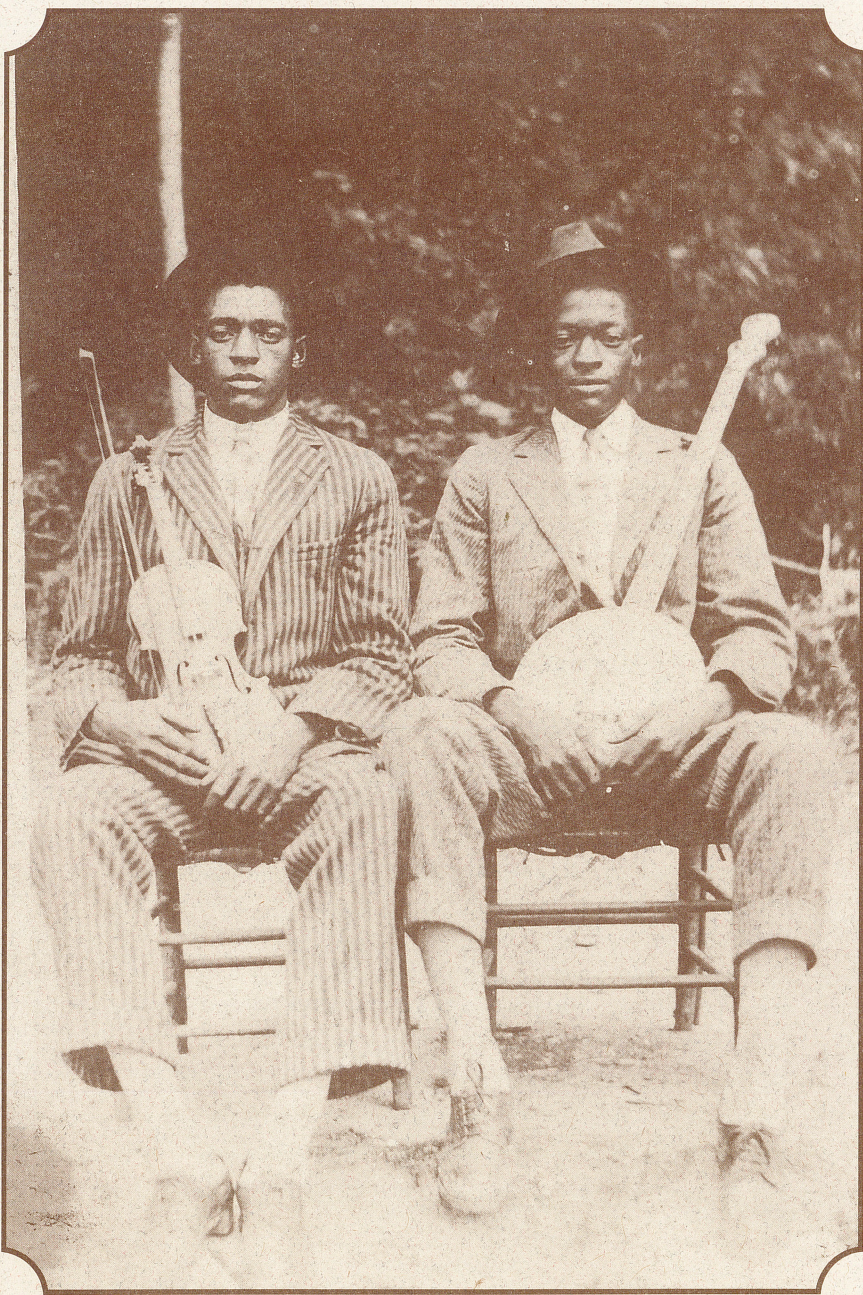
Might be, somebody *could* tell the Gibsons apart, but still, they was all crazy. Some quiet-crazy, some loud-crazy, but crazy all the same.

Like, how can you tell Will from John Gibson? Because Will got a right hand full of nubs, fingers all chopped off at the joint. When they was little boys, John - his brother - cut 'em off with an ax. Will said he didn't believe John would. John said, "Lay 'em on the block." Will did, and John did. See what I mean. CRAZY.

Also, liars. Not just the Gibsons, anybody would help a lie get started. Turn "looked like" into "hope *God* may kill me" in a minute. What you mean- they didn't *mean* to lie? Mean to or not, they did, and they did, like they did everything else. All together.

They got more ways of lying than treeing a possum or cooking greens. Just set up - ain't got nothing else to do - just set up and lie, like Mack and that casket.

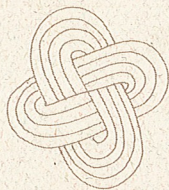
"Wouldn't it be something," he said, "if somebody's casket just rolled out Shady Grove. Got fed up with Rev. Strickland's hollering (plus, they'd heard it all before) and rolled on down the hill headed out to Level Grove Cemetery. Wouldn't that be something?" Mack said. Next thing I know, he's down there telling all his sisters and cousins he saw it. About two days later, they swore they saw it. I know what I'm saying. I was there. And I seen it too, rolling down the hill, that night. One dark night, about 11:30.



John & Will Gibson

Tanya Davenport

1955-1971



The pain in my head and
neck stopped a long time ago.
Except when I laugh so
hard, especially at my
oldest sister. I laugh so hard my
head hurts, but otherwise, I'm fine.
(That bad spot of eczema on my foot dried up too.)
Now, I *know* I can
tell some things. Me and the others
floating around on the hill - we look at you all like
you look at television. We do
what we want to. Every now and then, I *do* want a
nice cold pepsi-cola. Always did like 16 oz. pepsi's.
Now, I watch Momma, keeping all them pepsi's under the sink.
Wondering why she spills so many,
why it's less than she could swear she bought.
That's what she always say:
"I could swear I bought more than that." But I
don't mean no harm. Just having a little laugh.
Just having a little fun. We *don't*
mean no harm, me and the others like me on the
hill. Don't mean no harm, but
we mean *something*. We enjoy ourselves, too.
Miz Cleo? She loves her a good joke and she
been laughing a long time about -
but wait. Can't tell you that, right now!
Audrey 'nem down there in Atlanta,
right now. Everybody coming over to Audrey's. Say
they gone have a "non-fattening" Thanksgiving.
Oooh weee. This I got to see. I'll talk to you later.
Right now, I'm headed for Atlanta.

"Take my picture" Aug. 25, 9991

There they were, about twenty, of them
if they'd be still, but they wouldn't
at the top of Soque
hanging out in the tiny concrete
shelter built in the
space where the old schoolhouse was
almost exactly where, later, there was a
swimming pool. About twenty of them from 18
months to 18 years, some of the 18 year olds
with 18 months of their own

They *couldn't* stay
still shimmering in the late
evening sun in the middle of
what was trying to be what is

in constant motion
body, smiles, colors, and
one stepped out.
one young smooth-black male, said, "Take my
picture." a young woman echoed him, she with
a slight resemblance to
someone i once knew

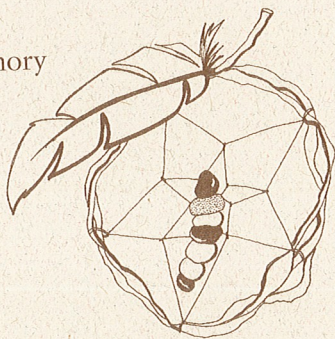
which was a signal to all
to get in the picture
acting like a camera had
been invented *just* to take this picture.
so i did.

They don't have a chance.
(Y'all ain't got a chance.)

This
is what you will remember:

the late evening sun / collected at the
gathering place a strange-familiar womon
with odd-looking long hair
at the top of Soque.

This you will
remember
& in that memory
be bound.



Ceremony



Soquee is a Cherokee word *for* the hill,
cross the railroad track, in Appalachian foothills,
where madness runs like possums. Like honeysuckle
kudzu
taking over everyone
insane and acceptable all the time
all the time, Soquee sits playing tricks
on minds

hainted.

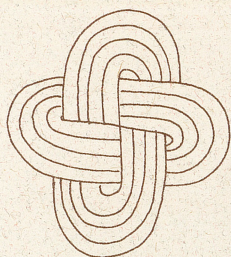


Sak Wi - Yi. Sounds Inflected
in rhythmical air
in a sacred place



*Don't mess with the sacred
It will get you every time.*





PHOTOS: JIMMY JOHNSTON



doris davenport (b.1949) is the oldest child of Ethel Mae Gibson Davenport; sister of (in order of appearance): dolores, Sandra, Maggie, Tanya, Audrey, & Anthony. She has a B.A. (Paine College, 1969) and a Ph.D. (Univ. of Southern California, 1985) in English. After working and writing all over the USA, she returned home (again) in 1992. Presently she lives in Sautee, and works as a full-time lecturer, writer, performance poet, and workshop leader. This is her fourth book of poetry. The others are *it's like this* (1980), *eat thunder & drink rain* (1982; Italian translation, *Mangia il tuono e bevi la pioggia*, 1988), and *voodoo chile / slight return* (1991).



Audrey Davenport (b. 1959) is the "baby girl". Born an artist, and encouraged at an early age by Mama, Tannie, doris and Al. Studied fine art / illustration at the Atlanta College of Art and the Art Academy of Cincinnati; Graphic design at OIC/Atlanta and the Portfolio Center. Has worked in Atlanta for the past 15 years. Illustrated 3 of doris' 4 books. Specializes in *feeling* a project, and researching what she doesn't - assures project originality & the fine art of graphic design. 404.672.0971.



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